

Webster imposes steady hand on CIA helm

By Sam Vincent Meddis
USA TODAY

To some hard-liners in the spy world, CIA Director William Webster is "Mild Bill" — as opposed to the rough-and-tumble World War II intelligence chief, William "Wild Bill" Donovan.

But most people refer to the soft-spoken Webster as "judge," an apt sobriquet for the former federal jurist who has brought a large measure of respectability to the scandal-prone agency.

"He's a person of great, towering integrity," says John Norton Moore, director of the University of Virginia's Center for Law and National Security.

Public perceptions of the CIA and its leadership are particularly important now, as U.S. intelligence shifts its focus from the Soviet bloc to post-Cold War subjects, such as economic competitiveness.

In addition, bright new analysts from colleges and the business world who might be attracted to an intelligence career are quickly turned off by hints of official lawlessness and dirty tricks, experts say.

Webster was FBI director when President Reagan named him to head the CIA in 1987, after the Iran-contra affair cast a cloud over the CIA.

Being called in as a healer was a case of *deja vu* for Webster: Nine years earlier he'd been tapped to rehabilitate the post-Watergate FBI.

Now, with the memory of Iran-contra fading, it's rumored that President Bush plans to replace Webster with someone who has a broader background in world affairs, perhaps James Lilley, U.S. am-

bassador to China, or Robert Gates, deputy director of the National Security Council.

But administration insiders say they've heard no talk of replacing Webster.

Bush "is very pleased with Judge Webster's performance," says White House spokesman Roman Popadiuk.

The rumors have been fueled by harsh but anonymous criticisms of Webster. A Knight-Ridder wire service report in February claimed Webster had been excluded from Bush's war councils during the gulf war. The report quoted an unnamed State Department official describing Webster as "pathetic and weak."

But many who have studied Webster's public career say his mild exterior can be deceptive.

The FBI under Webster, for example, maintained a hot pursuit of corrupt public officials.

"Look at Abecam," says Rep. Don Edwards, chairman of a House subcommittee that oversees FBI affairs. The 1980 case featured controversial films of lawmakers taking bribes.

Webster's FBI also bashed the Mafia's organizations in most cities, slashed the number of terrorist incidents, took its first strides into drug investigations and scored its greatest string of big-time spy arrests.

CIA officials say Webster, who attends most of Bush's

morning intelligence briefings, intentionally steers clear of policymaking sessions.

In contrast, the late William Casey, Webster's predecessor

at the CIA, was often criticized for crossing intelligence boundaries and assuming an activist role in Reagan's inner circle.

Given the cast of characters

in the administration, any CIA director might feel crowded, a House intelligence official says. Bush, for example, is a former CIA director; Gates is a former CIA deputy director; and Defense Secretary Dick Cheney was a member of the House Intelligence Committee.

Webster's independence has ruffled some feathers.

Last year, he testified before Congress that the Soviet threat would decline even if Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev were toppled. Cheney complained he would have an easier time selling his military budget to Congress if Webster had showed "a little more restraint in his statements."

Also, intelligence can be a convenient scapegoat for policy failures, and the director of central intelligence is invariably the most visible target.

"It's always easy for policymakers ... to blame intelligence rather than policy," says Mark Lowenthal, senior foreign policy specialist with the Congressional Research Service. "I think Webster was very, very necessary in getting the community back on an even keel after Iran-contra."

Some intelligence specialists say Webster's international outlook is limited. "Webster is a nice guy but he's not a strategic thinker," says ex-CIA official Vincent Cannistraro, a senior fellow at the Washington-based National Strategy Information Center.

But CIA Deputy Director Gary Foster, the agency's planning chief, insists Webster has established a strong system to

The Washington Post _____
The New York Times _____
The Washington Times _____
The Wall Street Journal _____
The Christian Science Monitor _____
New York Daily News _____
USA Today A-11 _____
The Chicago Tribune _____

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set long-range priorities and identify future worries.

Subjects of major concern: the changing Soviet military threat, weapons proliferation, economic and high-tech competition, and the political and economic developments in the Soviet Union and Europe.

Says Foster: "We're very focused on what the future is."

Duties of director

In addition to heading the Central Intelligence Agency, the director of central intelligence reports to the White House on other intelligence matters, and must keep Congress informed as well.

He has primary responsibility for covert actions approved by the president, and coordinates the intelligence-related operations of about a dozen other agencies and services, many within the Defense Department.

One thing the director lacks: the enforcement power.



By David Tellez, USA TODAY

WEBSTER: Ex-judge has brought a large measure of respectability to the scandal-prone intelligence agency.